

Irreverent Paris Weekly Delights in Stirring

By HENRY GINIGER
Special to The New York Times

Political Storms

PARIS, March 1—Today, as they do every Wednesday, several hundred thousand Frenchmen, including those in high places, picked up *Le Canard Enchaîné* to see who was being subjected to the ferocious humor of one of Europe's most famous satirical weeklies.

Since January, *Le Canard's* periodic nose-thumbing has been a matter of considerable political import. It was then that the paper began publishing Premier Jacques Chaban-Delmas's tax returns to show that for four years he had used a legal device to avoid income taxes.

The political life of the country has hung on the weekly appearance of the paper since then, with anxiety rising greatly as each Wednesday approached. In the uproar that ensued, Finance Minister Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had to go on television to defend the Government's tax policy and a grim-looking Premier made unprecedented use of the same medium to defend his private affairs.

There were a street demonstration, mutterings among citizens about privilege in high places, worried reports to the Government from provincial officials about the public state of mind, wide and persistent speculation about the Premier's political future and general cry for fiscal reform.

Telephones Were Tapped

"Our telephones were tapped," Roger Fressoz, the paper's publisher, asserted in an interview. "We also know that our tax returns were sent for and given a thorough going over in the Ministry of Finance."

There were also various kinds of efforts to intervene with the paper to halt the campaign, he recalled, including a worried letter from a cabinet Minister whom Mr. Fressoz did not name, saying he had heard rumors that he would shortly be mentioned and denying everything.

The storm is not the first *Le Canard* has provoked. Since 1915, when it first appeared as a pacifist organ, with a strong anarchist strain in the middle of a world war, the paper has been belaboring officialdom with great partiality.

"We lean leftward but we belong to no political group," Mr. Fressoz said. "Only twice could we be called a little governmental—during the Popular Front in 1936 and during the Premiership of Pierre Mendès-France in 1954."

"Canard" in French means duck; it is also a slang word for a newspaper. When *Le Canard* was founded by Maurice Maréchal, a pacifist journalist, wartime censorship was in force. Hence *Le Canard Enchaîné*, or the chained duck.

The paper has never stayed chained. Even during war time, it found a way to evade the censors with such expressions as "of course, it cannot be true that so-and-so has done such-and-such" or "the other papers are telling the truth so what we say must be false."

The tone is light and humorous even in serious matters and no Government has ever brought itself to seize the paper. *Le Canard* has had to contend with some libel suits but they have been surprisingly few considering the number of people attacked. Mr. Fressoz says the attacks are never meant to be personal but are carried out in the name of principle.

"In the Chaban case," he explained, "our only idea was to express the shock we felt when one of the highest personages of the state, who in addition has been espousing a new society, manages to avoid taxes even though in a perfectly legal way."

Humorous Irreverence

The paper loves to deflate the high and mighty. Its humorous irreverence has been best illustrated in the series called "The Court," which began when de Gaulle became President in 1959.

Writing under the name of Andre Ribaud, Mr. Fressoz attacked the pompous authoritarian tone of the Gaullist regime by picturing de Gaulle as Louis XIV. "The Court" was a weekly chronicle of the President's activities written in the French of the 17th and 18th centuries.

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not de Gaulle." The series has consequently lost much of its savor.

But those in power remain its favorite target. With some relish it recently quoted one Government circular that talked of what to do in case "of serious or mortal injury."

One of the paper's principles is never to accept advertising. It lives from its sale. It is priced at 1 franc 30 centimes, or about 25 cents. The circulation was about 340,000 until the Chaban affair when it jumped to about 450,000.

With a news staff of only 25, the paper is one of the few in Paris to make a steady profit. Ownership is spread among the staff members, who hold shares that cannot be sold or bequeathed.

The small dingy suite of offices in the downtown business district is close by the Bank of France, the Church of Notre Dame des Victoires and the social security office of the armed forces. These buildings represent three pillars of French society that *Le Canard* takes great delight in attacking.

Change in Mood Noted

The paper depends for much of its content on outside informers. Many are journalists who cannot get what they know printed in their own newspapers. Other contributors are in official places. Sometimes documents arrive anonymously.

"There has been a change in the Administration," he went on. "A lot of civil servants are getting fed up with all the favors that are handed out, the intervening by important officials on behalf of private interests, the letters that arrive making special pleas." Mr. Fressoz said this to explain how the paper was able to keep itself informed by an administration that has long had a reputation for discipline and loyalty.

Mr. Fressoz, a 50-year-old journalist who worked as a parliamentary reporter for Paris and provincial papers before joining *le Canard*, also noted a change in French po-

litical life.

"There is not much of a Parliament under this Republic so debate has been shifted elsewhere," he explained.

"In the old days, a scandal would call for a question in Parliament, a debate and a vote. Now, the press says something, the Government goes on television and somebody takes a poll."